Macomb County program fights Social Security fraud

■ Using secure Web site, staff now can connect to county's birth records, with a savings of $257K.

By EDWARD L. CARDENAS
The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS — The Macomb County Clerk and the Mount Clemens Social Security Office have developed a new program that will allow the federal agency to verify identification with a click of a mouse.

The innovative, Internet-based program was developed following the passage of a new Immigration Reform and Terrorist Prevention Act, which required that applications for Social Security numbers be verified through a third party.

That meant Social Security staff would have to go to the clerk's office with birth records to be manually verified.

Now Social Security employees can verify birth records using a secure Web site that is available to personnel with federal security clearance.

"The reason we enacted the law is there is a real problem with forged Social Security numbers," said U.S. Rep. Sander Levin, D-Royal Oak, the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee who visited Macomb County to see the program firsthand. "This makes sure it is right the first time."

Levin

The Mount Clemens office, which serves about 300,000 people in eastern and northern Macomb, is the first Social Security office in the nation to develop the technology. Employees at the office are responsible for verifying about 5,000 applications for Social Security numbers annually.

William Seaman, Social Security Administration district manager, estimates that the computer program will save the government more than $257,000 during the next five years.

While the computer program expedites the process, employees at the county and federal level never see any of the personal documents.

When a Social Security employee is doing a query, they input the first, middle and last name and date of birth of the individual. If the person was born in Macomb County, and the information is correct, the screen will then verify the birth record.

"It is private information," said Craig Jones, of ACS, the Syracuse-based computer company which designed the software.

"We don't want to pass documents back and forth."

Levin said he hopes this program will be used throughout the country to guard personal information and reduce the costs for Social Security.

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